DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 113 410 UD 015 505

AUTHOR Aveilhe, Clyde C.
TITLE Depreciated Self-Concept in Blacks: Implications for Counseling.
PUB DATE Mar 75
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Personnel and Guidance Association (New York, New York, March 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Counseling Effectiveness; *Counseling Goals; Counselor Acceptance; Counselor Performance; *Counselor Role; Cultural Differences; Cultural Factors; Negro Attitudes; *Negro Youth; Role Perception; *Self Concept; Self Esteem; Social Values

ABSTRACT

This paper begins by reviewing the literature on social perceptions and attitudes in terms of the black self-concept. Issues discussed here are culture conditioning and marginality, self-concept, social perception and attitudes, interrelationships between attitudes and perceptions, and the influence of cultural values and beliefs. Problems and attitudes that blacks might bring to the counseling session are dealt with next, followed by a discussion of the philosophical base or rationale for the counseling process. Suggested steps that counselors might immediately take as individuals and collectively as professionals to counsel these minority populations include an acceptance and encouragement of change, a recommitment to the goals of human fulfillment, and the development of a true respect for diversity. A number of suggestions directed to those individuals desirous to counsel minorities are: (1) counselors must move out of the cubicle into the community; (2) counselors' reliance on remedial services must be replaced by active preventative and developmental strategies; (3) counselors must become sensitive to the need to be involved in a greater diversity of services; and (4) counselors must begin to see themselves as facilitators of self-evaluation and decision-making. (Author/AM)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED113410

015505 E

Depreciated Self-Concept in Blacks: Implications for Counseling *

by

Clyde C. Aveilhe
Assistant Director, Washington Office
Educational Testing Service

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Professor Vontress has presented a most articulate exposition on the nature of black self-hatred. Although I find the thesis persuasive, and a bit depressing, I am not surprised by it. One need only to examine the literature and his own life experience to conclude that blacks in America have always had to operate in a context which exerts negative impact on their personalities and self-images.

Culture Conditioning and Marginality

Blacks in America exist in a context of cultural and psychological marginality. The mentality of the black American can be described as one which creates the feeling that, "we are in this society, but not of it." This condition, perhaps more studied today than in the past, is nothing new. Aristotle (Aristotle, 325 B.C., Book I), writing in antiquity, stated that a slavish condition begets a slavish mind. Glazer (1963, p. 51), observed that, "The Negro is only an American, and nothing else. He has no values and culture to guard and protect." Vontress (1975, paper presented A. P.G.A.), has merely updated and expanded these writers. The singular point made by all of these scholars is that both black and white Americans tend to see the nation in pro-white terms. This position, often denied by blacks, is the result of the inescapable culture conditioning which all

UD 015 505

---

*A paper presented at the American Personnel and Guidance Association's Annual Convention, March, 1975, in New York City.

who are socialized by the American system adopt. The acculturation that brings us all into a common perspective, or concensus value system, occurs in both overt and covert ways. Although blacks may resent whites, they, like everyone else in this society, are conditioned to see white as the "ideal."

All Americans, black or white, liberal or conservative think and act according to their cultural conditioning. All of our minds are, even if unconsciously so, pro-white. Although this fact has generally not caused any problems for whites, it has proved most painful for blacks. This viewing of what is associated with white as normal and what is associated with black as deviant has been the source of gravely self-defeating views of reality in black people. Black people, in order to survive, have been forced to become bi-cultural. Blacks have had, on the one hand, to pretend to see, think, believe, and feel as whites do, but on the other hand, live effectively in a completely different world, aware of their inability to be truly free. This split personality has had considerable impact on blacks, causing frustration, denial, and degradation. The black poet Arna Bontempts (1963, p. 14), writing of this confusion of identity for black Americans, observed that

> We wear the mask that grins and lies
> It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes
> This debt we pay to human guile
> With torn and bleeding hearts we smile
> And mouth with myriad subtleties.

The problem, most directly stated is the fact that although blacks have found it imperative to pretend in so many ways to be white, they have

at the same time been denied the right to act as whites do, to be free. Despite this charade, black Americans have always known that they were only peripheral to the nation's life and this awareness has severely damaged their self-image. Today many blacks are reappraising, and attempting to recreate that self-image. The success or failure of this process is yet to be determined.

Self-Concept

A great amount of research has been done on black self-concept. Much of this study has been concerned with the development of this self-concept, the evaluation of self, and considerations of self-esteem in blacks. Unfortunately, much of the research has been conducted in a negative context, starting from the position that to be black is to be less than whole. Using small samples of low socioeconomic black and white boys Hauser (1970), administered psychometric interviews, projective tests, and Q-sort tasks. The various patterns of identity formation were described according to an Eriksonian model showing consistent or distinct differences between the identity development of black and white subjects. When compared to whites, blacks self-image showed little structural integration over the duration of the study. Whites showed progressive increases in structural integration of values. Black self-images had a static quality suggesting identity foreclosure and negative self-concept.

Measures of blacks on self-ratings are also abundant in the literature. In the majority of such research differences were found in blacks and whites in regard to their views of the self as perceived by the individual, as it

was believed by the individual to be perceived by others, and the self as the individual ideally would like it to be. Black students achieved consistently greater discrepancies between their actual IQ scores and their ratings on self-scales than did white youngsters (Gibby and Gabler, 1967, p. 144-148). Black and white children did not differ significantly on ideal discrepancy.

Projective tests have also been used extensively to indicate self-image. Goffeney and Butler (1969, p. 437-438), attempted to analyze the drawings of black and white children to learn something of their self-images. Bergelson (1967, p. 16-18), studied black youngsters in terms of the influence of family structure on self-concept. While most of this research with projective techniques did not show black children to project an image of hopelessness and inadequacy, it did reveal that even in the very young, black self-concept is less positive than that of whites.

The effects of education and educational interventions on self-concept have been the focus of considerable concern. Much of our social programming is undergirded by the belief that education and early intervention can change the course of life and improve the lot of the less fortunate. Educational practices have been studied to attempt to determine to what extent they influence the development of self-concept. Studies by Taylor (1968, p. 821-822), McWhirt (1967, p. 2610-B), Bienvenu (1968, p. 692), and Strauss (1967, p. 63-76) dealt with the relationship of self-concept to racial composition of the school setting. The studies showed differences between the races in the dimensions of centrality, dependency, individuation, and power. Attendance in segregated schools intensified these differences

for one or both races.

Studies have also been conducted on the effects on self-concept of the use of innovative educational practices. In works by Talley (1963, p. 2524), Allen (1969, p. 3032-A), and Freyberg (1966, p. 102-107) the self-concept of black students did not improve as a result of innovative educational practices.

Social Perceptions and Attitudes

Attitudes or readiness to respond either positively or negatively donot simply "spring up." They develop as a result of social perceptions which tend to impute meaning to various sensations. Attitude development and attitude change are both experience-oriented. The experiences one has, as well as the specific information he receives exert considerable influence upon the individual's attitudes. This effect is true in both attitude development and attitude change.

The belief that attitude change is possible, given experiential change, to some extent justifies counseling as a vehicle for societal reform. Attitude change is more likely when the new attitude proves rewarding and when such change is seen by the individual as the result of his own decision rather than of external imposition. The research into attitude change has dealt in the main with racial attitudes and the impact of the socialization process on these attitudes.

Schaffer and Schaffer (1966, p. 274-285)found the method and content of socialization used by parents to be the most important force affecting white youths' attitudes towards blacks and other minorities. Directive methods

were found to yield more positive attitudes than did non-directive approaches.

Sherif and Sherif (1967, p. 246-261) contended that contact among members of unfriendly groups is the key to settling socialproblems and effecting positive attitude change. This hypothesis has been tested extensively and generally seems to be upheld in the literature. However, the contention doesnot seem to hold in cases of very limited or superficial contact making generalization somewhat risky. The summary conclusion drawn from this look at the investigations into attitude development and attitude change is that those studying attitude change must be ever sensitive to the possibility of drawing incorrect inferences from the data encountered, and that global statements relative to results should be avoided.

Interrelationships Between Attitudes and Perceptions

Individuals tend to respond to events and ideas with predetermined favorable or unfavorable dispositions. These positive or negative attitudes are controlled by both past experience and the context of the moment. In short, attitudes and perceptions are inextricably interrelated. Thus one's readiness to respond and the meaning he places on a given situation has been the subject of considerable investigation. Historically attitudes toward the colors black and white have shown black to generally receive negative evaluation and white generally rated positively. Such attitudes hold in contexts where black and white are conceptualized racially.

Stabler, Johnson, Berke, et. al. (1969, p. 1233-1239) studied racial stereotypes in black and white preschool children. They found that the

racial attitudes of the larger society had been introjected into and incorporated by these youngsters. Although this incorporation had occurred in both black and white children, it was more pronounced in whites.

Datta, Schaefer, and Davis (1968, p. 94-101) looked at sex and scholastic aptitude as variables in teachers' ratings of adjustment and classroom behavior. These investigators found both ethnic group and sex to be significantly related to teacher descriptions of classroom behavior. Generally, girls and other subjects were described more favorably than boys and blacks. No interactions of ethnic group and sex were noted. The U. S. Office of Education has in the last several weeks been looking at reports which indicate that in several school systems discipline is not the same for black and white youngsters. These reports have stated that black youngsters are subjected to more frequent and more severe discipline than their white counterparts.

The Influence of Cultural Values and Beliefs

Just as cultural values of a group tend to be translated into beliefs of that group, so do beliefs and attitudes tend to influence attitudes toward self and others. Research into the effects of stereotypes about blacks on black self-image has long been an area of great interest.

Colle (1968, p. 309-310) studied the image of blacks as portrayed by the American mass media. With specific reference to the "new black image," Colle held that this new image may be an inaccurate reflection of the real alternatives open to blacks. This position is most interesting for it is

suggesting that at the same time that the media are pressing a wide-spread articulation of a non-discriminatory policy there is reason to question whether, in fact either whites or blacks are truly being stimulated to accept the notion that blacks belong in the mainstream. Colle's findings also indicated that despite an increasingly positive portrayal of blacks by the media, black citizens display disaffection and suspicion toward the mass media.

The contention that there has emerged a positive new image of blacks has been put forth increasingly in the last few years. This new image is held to have had considerable positive effect on black self-concept. Many now insist that there have been meaningful changes in how blacks view themselves and "black is beautiful" is the slogan of the decade, if not the last half of the century. This new black self-concept has been said to be reflective of blacks sudden ability to accept their marginality and to cease to be confused by the frustrating syndrome of living black and pretending to think white. Malcom X (1964) reminded black people that they are not white people and that blacks should free themselves from whiteness.

Concluding Statements on Research

Understandings of social perceptions and attitudes should be increased. This can only be done if we can come to understand the psychology of the perception of self and others. This is no more true for black Americans than it is for any other group of people. The old stereotype of black self-rejection must be re-explored in the light of recent findings.

The Special Plight of Black Youth

Today many insist that the situation of minority groups is better than it has ever been. Many insist that there is "light at the end of the tunnel." Black teenagers are not likely to be among these optimists. No segment of a people is a better index of their plight than those who are approaching adulthood. There is today a deep and widespread identity crisis among American blacks, and teenage blacks are acting out this distress. The black juvenile is a victim. Black youth feel the emptiness of their parents and the lack of solution to their own identity problems. These young people, titillated by blaxploitation films and discouraged by an unemployment rate of from 41 to 65 percent, see little in the way of viable alternatives to their poverty cycles. How, in good conscience, can we counsel these youngsters in the direction of the American dream? According to the Wall Street Journal (March 18, 1975, p. 20), "If the economy doesnot improve an entire generation of young blacks will enter adulthood in the 1980's without ever having held a job." The implications of this possibility are not pleasing.

In light of the state in which black youth find themselves today it seems reasonable that these individuals will be aggressive and hostile. The problem is that this hostility is often vented on their own people. Cannon (1975, p. 34, 48) contends that there is an inverse relationship between heightened black militancy and black fighting gangs. He further argues the suspension of this militancy is responsible for the resurrection of youth gangs, this time more numerous, vicious, and destructive than ever before.

Black youth reflects the prevailing mood of the larger black communities in the most vivid way. Black spirits have been depressed since the early 1970's which seemed to say that the struggles of the 1960's were in vain. Many blacks viewed the law and order theme of the early 70's as a mere euphemism for anti-black attitudes and felt that idealism had been replaced by repression. Concern over politics, education, and freedom issues had been replaced by bewilderment, anger, and despair. Given the history of black identity problems and the impact of the current economic crisis one ought to be able to realize to some extent the complexity of juvenile and general malaise among black Americans.

And What of Counseling?

Having detailed a most challenging, and perhaps depressing portrait of sorts of problems and attitudes blacks might bring to the counseling session, our attention immediately turns to the question of "how do we counsel such people?" Perhaps this is our initial mistake. Rather than beginning with the how we might do well to first examine the why, the philosophical base or rationale for whatever we are to do as counselors. Many counselors donot know what they are doing, but an even greater number have little if any rationale for why they are doing whatever it is that they are doing, or think that they are doing. Before we rush to take action, to use our "techniques" we would do well to reflect on our objectives and goals of our counseling. The what and the how, the process of counseling, should logically follow from, not proceed the why of the involvement.

The Need for A Philosophical Base

What are the objectives and goals of counseling for individuals such as those described herein and by Professor Vontress? White (1948, p.314) has stated that when a person acts in the capacity of therapist, his goal is not to dominate or persuade, but simply to restore a state of good health. A therapist has nothing to sell and nothing to prescribe. The goals of Rogers (1952, p. 187) counseling are evident in his definition of it as "the process by which the structure of the self is relaxed in the safety of the relationship with the therapist, and previously denied experiences are perceived and then intergrated into an altered self." Commenting on the goals of counseling, Williamson (1950, p. 221) feels, "the counselor assists the student to choose goals which will yield maximum satisfaction within the limits of those compromises necessitated by uncontrolled and uncontrollable factors in the individuals and in society itself."

It is obvious that counseling is defined in many ways and counselors range all the way from someone who has just completed a few semester hours of training to a Menninger or a Rogers. Whatever counseling is it is an expression of human values and human attitudes, and its objectives are determined by the humanistic feeling that man is basically a capable, self-determining creature. Are these definitions and objectives different for the black client than for other clients? Are we working with black clients for a different set of reasons than those which motivate us to deal with mainstreamers? If our reasons are not different, why must our methods be different? Rather than contend that differnt methods are required to deal with minority clients might we not examine the idea that these clients simply present more difficult cases in which we must apply our basic techniques.

A Course of Action for Us All

What must we do? How can we help these individuals who have had such a bad time of it, and thereby help ourselves and all of society? There is of course no definitive answer to this question. However, there are a number of steps that counselors might take immediately as individuals and collectively as professionals.

1. Begin with introspection. All of us, and whites in particular, must begin to look at ourselves more realistically in order to see what we are as well as what we are not. So much of our activity is based on the premise that blacks need help that we often look only at the "unfortunate" client and not at ourselves and others around us. Indeed, with the possible exception of the albino rat, the black American is the most studied of life's creatures. The time has come to turn the microscope on the majority.

2. Broaden our scope. Rather than simply espousing our belief in a pluralistic world, we must develop a true respect for diversity. Only by blending and re-integrating diverse elements can the quality of wholeness be achieved.

3. Accept and encourage change. We must view change as necessary and desirable and work to make the dynamics of our institutions cease to work against change. Racist institutions must not be preserved.

4. We must re-commit ourselves to the goal of human fulfillment and actualization.

5. Work for equity. Compensation, not equality is necessary to restore rights and opportunities previously denied people.

The Role of the Counselor

How shall we become effective with such difficult clients as these disillusioned black youngsters? What are specific steps that counselors might take to make themselves "more relevant to the sort of context in which this type of client is likely to be found? All of these are most important and most difficult questions. Although there are no definitive answers to such questions there are a number of suggestions to be made to those who are desirous of, or likely to be working with such individuals.

To begin with we must look for fundamental changes in the counselor's job orientation. No longer can the counseling office be the limit of our domains. Counselors can no longer conceal their ineffectiveness from public scrutiny nor can they fail to share responsibility with the client for the progress of counseling. The assumption of low motivation or client resistance will not suffice. The counselor must move out of his cubicle and in to the community. In so doing, the counselor must become sensitive to forces in the environment which contribute to distress.

Secondly, minorities and others have tired of society's depersonalization and are dissatisfied with our attempts to work on their intellectual performance without concern for their personal-emotional development. Minority students particularly have emphasized the inability of counselors to understand and accept their unique needs and life styles. The result of this emphasis has caused many young people to remain silent and uninvolved, giving the image of being uninterested with "normal" concerns. To effect some degree

of change in this situation counselors must cease to be simply passive listeners and strive to become ac tive participants in the community. This approach will demand that the counselor move away from the reliance on remedial services and adopt an active preventative and developmental strategy for his actions.

Counselors, retaining a primary focus on individual counseling, must become sensitive to a need to be involved in a greater diversity of services. The move from a passive service role, restricted to contact with one person at a time, to a more aggressive search for various procedures having impact on groups or on an entire community is a must. The assumption by counselors of novel service roles must be re-examined and evaluated from the perspective of the types of problems prospective clients are likely to present.

Finally, the counselor must begin to see himself as the facilitator of self-evaluation and decision making. This view of one's role will allow for the possibility that as a counselor one might find himself assisting the client to resist the policies and rules established by individuals and institutions of the mainstream. The implication here is that the counselor ought to see his role and his effectiveness somehow related to his disassociation from the power structure. We have all heard the argument that the client who fears some disciplinary action may have problems in being candid. Such a client is likely to have difficulty in revealing with one with whom he can see potential for revealed information being used against him. Black clients are most likely to feel this possibility with white counselors who are perceived as a part of the same system that is suppressing them.

Low socioeconomic and mono-culturally black individuals may well hold the same opinion of middle-class black counselors. Although some degree of distance between the counselor and the system is advocated, it should be remembered that attempts at total disengagement from the decision-making structure may actually be a cop-out into the security of neutrality. The neutral counselor, remaining silent on institutional procedures, may be viewed as acceptant of these procedures. The counselor must in fact tread a thin and often dangerous line between the establishment and the client. The counselor, existing for the good of the client, must come to see himself as expendable, and accept this vulnerability as one of the hazards of the profession. The counselor of black clients must accept the fact that he may be the most vulnerable of all counselors since he may, if he is to work for the good of his clientele, find himself most distant from the accepted patterns and practices of the mainstream.

Summary

America must recognize the American black as an important and contributing member of this society. The black communities in this country are fragmented and this fragmentation is a major cause of the depression that exists in black communities. White America must develop the necessary sensitivity to the needs of blacks to begin to help them to integrate their multiple aspirations and drives into a more wholistic mission. The approach to these individuals must be multi-dimensional, acceptant of the root identity of the black American. Blacks are fighting for their spiritual and psychological life and we all must assist them. Only then can we shift our emphasis from symptom suppression to cause determination.

References

Allen, E. An investigation of change in reading, achievement, self-concept, and creativity of disadvantaged elementary school children experiencing three methods of training. Dissertation Abstracts, 1969, 29, 3032-A.

Aristotle The Politics. 325 B.C.

Bergelson, A. An intercomparison of self, man and woman drawings made by culturally deprived Negro children. Child Study Center Bulletin, State University College, Buffalo, 1967, 3, 16-18.

Bienvenu, M. Effects of school intergration on the self-concept and anxiety of lower class Negro adolescent males. Dissertation Abstracts, 1968, 29, 692.

Bontempts, A. American Negro Poetry. New York: Hill and Wang, 1963, p. 14.

Cannon, J. A new Identity-the black dispora. Urban Health, Febr., 1975, p. 34.

Colle, R. Negro image in the mass media. Journalsim Quarterly, 1968, 45 (1), 55-60.

Datta, L. et. al. Sex and scholastic aptitude as variables in teachers' ratings of the adjustment and classroom behavior of Negro and other seventh-grade students. Journal of Educational Psychology, 1968, 59, 94-101.

Freyberg, J. Digest of research studies on the relation of socio-economic status to personality variables (1962-1965). Graduate Research in Education and Related Disciplines, 1966, 2, 102-107.

Gibby, R. and Gabler, R. The self-concept of Negro and white children. Journal of Clinical Psychology, 1967, 23, 144-148.

Glazer, N. Beyond the Melting Pot. Cambridge: 1963, p. 51.

Goffeney, B. and Butler, B. Do Negro children project an image of helplessness and inadequacy in drawing a person? Proceedings of American Psychological Association, 77th, 1969, 4, 437-438.

Haley, A. The Autobiography of Malcom X. New York: Grove Press, 1964.

Hauser, S. Black and white identity development: aspects and perspectives. Presented at American Psychiatric Association, San Francisco, May, 1970.

McWhirt, R. The effects of desegregation on prejudice, academic aspiration and the self-concept of tenth grade students. Dissertation Abstracts, 1967, 28, 2610-B.

Rogers, C. On Becoming a Person. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961, p. 216.

Schaffer, R. and Schaffer, A. Socialization and the development of attitudes towards Negroes in Alabama. Phylon, 1966, 27, 274-285.

Sherif, M. and Sherif, C. An Outline of Psychology. New York, 1956.

Stabler, J. et. al. The relationship between race and perception of racially related stimuli in preschool children. Child Development, 1969, 29, 1233-1239.

Vontress, C. Self-Hatred in Americans of African Descent. Presented at American Personnel and Guidance Association, New York City, March 25, 1975.

Wall Street Journal Urban Arms Race. Vol. CLXXXVI, No. 49, March 12, 1975.

Williamson, E. G. Counseling Adolescents. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1950, p. 221.